



KEY WORDS IN INSTRUCTION

Blogs and Blogging, Part II

by Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson

This article (Part I and Part II) examines a relatively new use of technology through blogs and blogging, defines related key words, and analyzes how this form of communication is impacting library media specialists, other educators, and students.

From humorous teen journals to serious scientific peer review, blogging has become a fast-growing online activity. As a Web-based communication tool, a blog is simply a web log. In most cases, a single author writes and posts short articles displayed in reverse chronological order. These blogs are generally open to the public, and visitors are encouraged to comment on the author's entries. Educators, however, can easily restrict access depending on the nature of the learning activity.

Blogs in Teaching and Learning

Will Richardson, a high school

Annette Lamb, a Senior Lecturer and Adjunct Professor for Online Course Development, and Larry Johnson, an Adjunct Professor at the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University at Indianapolis provide additional information about blogging on their website (<http://escapbooking.com/blogging/>).

supervisor of Instructional Technology and Communications in Flemington, New Jersey, and author of *Web Logg-ed* points out that blogs are used to publish student work, collaborate with remote locations, and manage the knowledge construction activities of the learning community. Beyond traditional applications, he stresses that blogging allows a new type of writing that forces writers to read carefully and critically, demands clarity in construction, and links to sources of ideas. What he has called "connective writing" is closely aligned with the information

inquiry activities promoted by library media specialists (2006).

Doug Johnson, Director of Media and Technology for Mankato Public Skills and author of *Blue Skunk Blog*, adds that blogging begins with reading, but also may begin with primary sources such as artifacts, surveys, experiments, interviews, or personal experiences (<http://doug-johnson.squarespace.com/>).

Rather than viewing blogging as a series of content-area writing

activities, consider the specific critical and creative thinking that occur in this learning environment. You also can think about the role of students in making postings and adding comments. When creating learning blogs, ask yourself these questions:

- **Purpose and learning outcomes.** What's the purpose of the blog? Why is the blog format being used?
- **Blog audience.** What are the primary and secondary audiences for the blog? Are bloggers writing for themselves or a specific audience such as the teacher, other students within the class, students in other classrooms, parents or local community members, or a global audience? Is the blog intended to be used inside or outside the classroom?
- **Blog hosting.** Who will host the blog? Will the host be a teacher or the school library media specialist, or will each student have his or her own personal blog? Is this blog the responsibility of the individual, divided among small groups, or shared by the class as a whole?
- **Learning Outcome.** What are the expectations, and how do these reflect the learning goal? What are the specific learning outcomes? What is the objective of the lesson(s)?



What standards are being addressed? When used in teaching and learning, the educational outcomes must be made clear for the students.

- **Blog Content.** Will the teacher or students make the initial postings? What activities will occur within the blog? What activities will facilitate high-level thinking such as analysis, synthesis, formulating plans, or drawing conclusions? What information will be shared? Where will this information originate? Many blogs are used to share information including facts, stories, data, statistics, links to other resources, opinions, and much more. In addition to text, the blog could contain audio, video, and visuals.
- **Process or Product.** Is the blog about process, product, or both? Teachers often use blogs as a tool to document the information inquiry process.
- **Reflection.** Blogs can be used as a metacognitive tool to help people think about their life or learning. These reflections may be intended for themselves, their classmates, or the world.
- **Interaction.** Some blogs focus on communication between the person posting the entry and the people making comments. The responses may include additional information, expanded ideas, or critiques. Sometimes the most important aspect of the blog is questioning. With young children, the interaction is often between the child and the teacher.
- **Assessment.** How will learning be assessed? Do the

learning outcomes match the assessment? Some blogs are used as a tool for assessment to check student understanding. Bloggers may be asked to state facts, analyze an article, or express their understandings.

In their article titled "Scaffolding for Struggling Students: Reading and Writing with Blogs," Sara Kajder and Glen Bull describe how blogs can be used by teachers and student writers to create an engaging, rich writing space. They stress that blog characteristics particularly relevant to instruction include economy, archiving, feedback, multimedia, immediacy, and active participation. They have identified ten instructional uses of blogs in reading and writing including character journals, character roundtables, open minds, think-aloud postings, literature circle group responses, nutshelling, devil's advocate writing, exploding sentences, photoblogs, and storyblogs (2003).

The library media specialist and classroom teachers can collaborate on the creation of meaningful blog activities. They can consider some of the following assignments:

- **Analyze.** Ask students to analyze a book, article, or other posting, and then compare their perspectives.
- **Brainstorm.** Pose problems and create a collection of ideas. Ask students to synthesize the ideas and make recommendations.
- **Chronicle.** Follow and record an event. Trace a timeline; create a parallel timeline.
- **Collaborate.** Work collaboratively with another class in the same school or another

school.

- **Communicate.** Interact with an expert or conduct an interview.
- **Compare.** Make a comparison.
- **Critique.** Ask students to write reviews for websites, books, movies, games, local sights, or other topics.
- **Discuss.** Examine a problem, question, drawing, photograph, or diagram, and then write captions, analyze elements, speculate, or create. Some blogs focus on interaction, reaction, and discussion of a wide range of topics. While forum software is sometimes used for these, blogs also can be effective. Use the blog format for literature-rich discussions related to award-nominated books, literature circles, or community book club connections.
- **Explain.** Ask students to learn and demonstrate their understanding of the information.
- **Imagine.** Ask students to imagine a situation or scenario.
- **Inquiry.** Use the blog as a tool for questioning, exploring, and investigating. Individually or in groups, students can chronicle the inquiry process and use the blog to share their experiences, reflections, and challenges. The blog also can be used to interact and share ideas, provide feedback, and critique ideas.
- **Journal.** Keep a journal, log, or diary. Work individually or as a class to compose journal entries or assign groups or individual students.
- **Motivate.** Sometimes a topical blog can generate passion

in students who may otherwise find school boring and meaningless. They also may be asked to motivate others to take action.

- **Observe and Log.** Observe human interactions, scientific experiments, or other activities and post a record (i.e., kindness journal, plant growth, survey results). Some blogs focus on a particular shared experience such as an annual event, field trip, or schoolwide activity. The blog is used to record the experience. It also might involve connecting with students in other locations for a virtual experience.
- **Persuade.** Ask students to make a persuasive argument.
- **Predict.** Read or watch and predict what will happen next.
- **Problem Solve.** Pose a problem and discuss solutions.
- **Question.** Get students involved with asking questions.
- **React, Think, Act.** Connect in-class learning to blog entries. Transfer learning to new situations.
- **Read and Jigsaw.** Read or use online resources and discuss them (i.e., quote, website, poem, historical document, problem, literature circles). Then, analyze, evaluate, and create. Add a comment.
- **Remember and Reflect.** Think about an activity and reflect on it.
- **Report.** Share local or global current events as a class or individually. The student or teacher posts current events articles and invites reactions, thoughts, alternative perspectives, or solutions. Use

the blog format to post reports. Students can add web-links to webpages, music, or videos. Some blogs also allow photographs. Categories might include key topics or be presented chronologically.

- **Share Teacher and Student Work.** Any type of written work such as poetry, short stories, or television scripts can be the focal point for a blog. Blogs, however, also can be used to share other creative works such as artwork, musical scores, and video productions. Share materials in a digital format including documents, PDF files, photographs, charts, graphics, written work, audio, video, and presentations. Some blogs are used for maintaining a portfolio of student work.

Blogging in Information Inquiry

From journaling about the inquiry process to applying blog technology in a final product, blogging has many applications in information inquiry. Clarence Fisher, a middle school teacher in Canada, involves his students in creating blogs. He notes in his blog, *Remote Access*, that drawing information from a variety of sources, bringing it together with additional information, and thinking about the implications is not new, but placing synthesized thought online for others to access, use, and modify is new for today's students (<http://remoteaccess.typepad.com/>).

In her article "Blogging to Learn," Anne Bartlett-Bragg, a faculty member at the University of Technology, Sydney, stresses that individual ownership of

content differentiates blogging from other electronic forums like discussion boards and mailing lists. Learners control what is published and engage readers with their writing. Bartlett-Bragg has identified a five-stage process for blogging with learners:

- **Establishment.** Students recall and record learning events. Guided questions facilitate writing.
- **Introspection.** Students continue to record events, but also reflect on and evaluate these experiences.
- **Reflective monologues.** Students take more responsibility for topics, develop questioning techniques, and write for themselves rather than the teacher.
- **Reflective dialogue.** Students consider their style of expression, intended audience, and publication of their thoughts. They move away from surface level reporting to personal knowledge publishing.
- **Knowledge artifact.** Students move to reflecting on the knowledge learned and providing guidance to readers who may use the information to enhance their own learning (2003).

Blogging activities can be integrated throughout the inquiry process. Blogs can be used in both individual and collaborative inquiry environments. One of the advantages of blogs is the ability to extend postings through the use of comments. In an inquiry activity, these comments may come from the individual conducting the investigation, the supervising teacher, peers, or outside participants such as students in other schools, local volunteers,

or members of the virtual community (see Figure 3).

Ask students to track their inquiry experience by using blog entries to record their activities, thoughts, and reflections as they move through each aspect of the inquiry process. Students may reflect on their activities identifying a topic, solving a problem, answering questions, or conducting research. They may even go back and comment on their own postings as they reflect on their progress.

To extend this metacognitive activity, the teacher librarian may comment on student progress and provide helpful feedback and suggestions. Students often wait until the last moment to do a project. A blog can keep students on track and allow the teacher to provide guidance and encouragement throughout the information inquiry process.

In addition, classmates may become involved in peer sharing, support, encouragement, mentoring, or cognitive apprenticeships. In other words, if a peer finds that a classmate is having difficulty focusing on a topic, he or she may add a comment that suggests a direction or source to consider.

The library media specialist

can consider ways to move these virtual activities beyond the walls of the school. For example, local senior citizens may be asked to provide their insights into inquiry projects through posting comments in a student blog. Members of a scientific community may be willing to share their professional insights related to an environment investigation.

Beyond individual inquiry activities with outside contributions, blogs can be used as a tool for collaborative inquiry experiences. A blog may serve as the gathering place for information inquiry. In other words, students may brainstorm questions, categorize their ideas, and come to consensus on a project direction. Later in the project, this online community may share and evaluate resources, identify varied perspectives, and synthesize their findings. While initial postings may be used to structure activities, students also may use the blog as a free flowing environment for sharing and discovery.

Danny Callison, professor in the School of Information and Library Science at Indiana University at Indianapolis, states that inquiry can be viewed as controlled, guided, modeling, or free (1999). These levels are useful

in planning blog-based activities. For example, in a controlled inquiry environment, the teacher librarian may create the initial blog postings and ask students to respond by telling stories, evaluating sources, or comparing approaches. In the free inquiry environment, students create their own blog postings and control the level of outside interaction.

Callison states in his book, *Key Words, Concepts, and Methods for Information Age Instruction*, that meaningful information application comes from analysis of information need, analysis of information gained, and synthesis of information to address the need in the most efficient and effective manner possible (2003). The interactive components of information inquiry are questioning and exploring, assimilation and inference, and reflection.

An illustration of how a student conducting an individual information inquiry might go through this recursive process making initial blog postings and subsequent comments on his or her own work as the inquiry progresses can be found in Figure 4 (page 44). In the illustration, numbers are used to indicate the order in which the entries were made. The student began with a posting brainstorming questions. Then, an experience related to information exploration was recorded as a posting. Next, the learner returned to the first posting and added a comment sharing a thought. The student eventually made seven postings and ten related comments.

Inquiry, Connectiveness, and Synergy

George Siemens, an instructor

Figure 3. Blogging in Information Inquiry

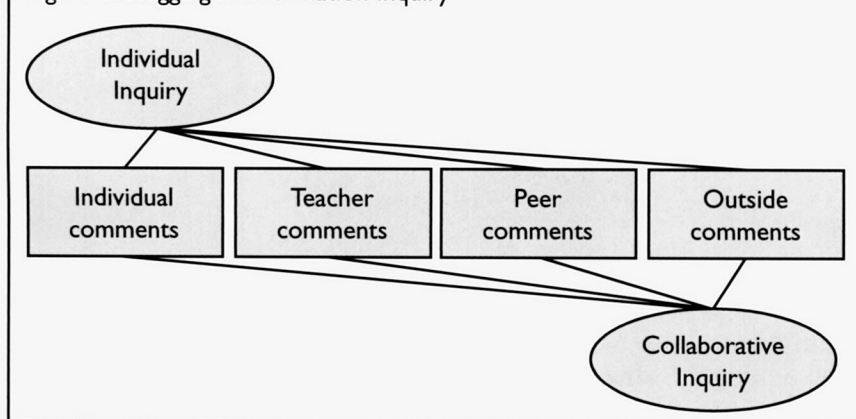
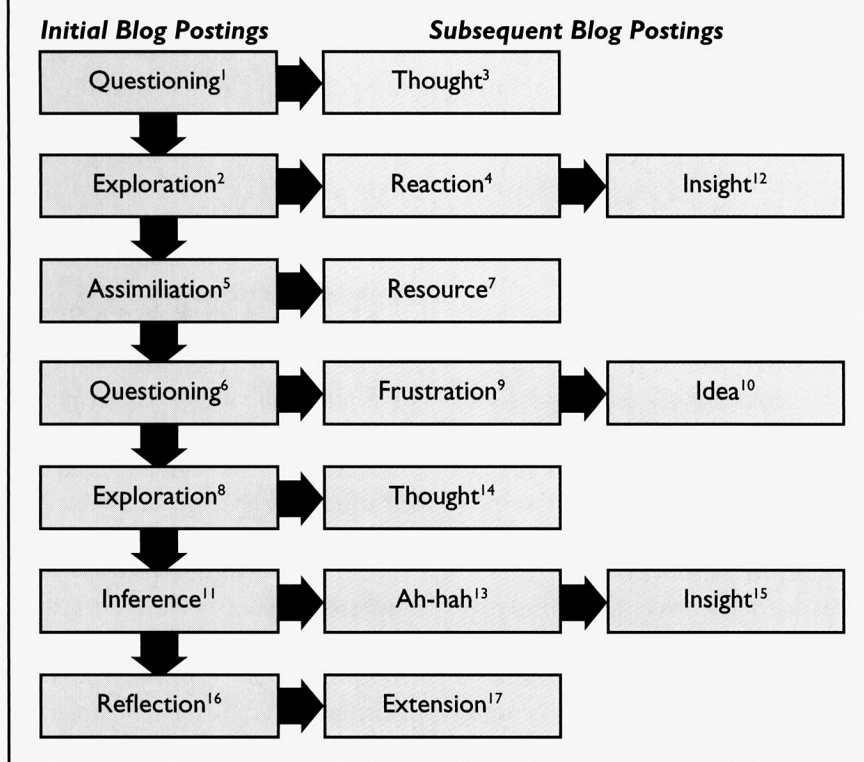


Figure 4. Visualizing the Information Inquiry Process



at Red River College in Manitoba, Canada, has developed a learning theory focusing on the idea of connectivism stressing that learning is a process of connecting ideas and concepts. Siemens has observed that learning is no longer simply an internal, individualistic activity. He points out that the additional value of blogs comes from the ability for learners to teach and learn from each other (<http://www.connectivism.ca/blog>).

Konrad Glogowski, an elementary language arts teacher in Canada, states that learners need more than blogging tools and time to write. In addition, students must become members of an online learning community and view writing and reading as cognitive tools for learning. Being plugged into a social network allows a student's simple posting to have added meaning when it gets inter-

preted, re-interpreted, commented on, and discussed by other members of the group. Students soon begin to see patterns and connections. The blog thus becomes a catalyst for inquiry (<http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog>).

Annette Lamb, a Senior Lecturer and Adjunct Professor for Online Course Development, and Larry Johnson, an Adjunct Professor at the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University at Indianapolis, provide additional information about blogging on their website (<http://escrapbooking.com/blogging/>).

For Further Reading

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For examples of Educator, School Library Media Center, and Other Blogs, see Part I (April issue), page 43. 🖱